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ABSTRACT

A program was developed to address the needs of 20 day students with emotional and behavioral disturbances, who had been expelled from other special school programs. A small group format was used to teach and to practice fundamental social skills necessary for coping with the classroom environment. Groups of three children were formed on the basis of similar developmental levels and social compatibility. Each group received 10 hours of instruction, focusing on identifying feelings in self and others, understanding feelings, expressing feelings, and managing such feelings as anger and frustration. In addition, all of the school staff were trained in the curriculum content so they could assist with generalization from the program back to the home classroom. Twenty-three of 25 special educators endorsed the continuation of the intervention program beyond its pilot stage. (Contains 14 references and a bibliography of approximately 50 items.) (JDD)

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The Development and Implementation of a Group Social Skills Program for Emotionally Disturbed Children in a Special Education School

by

George W. Roy

Cohort 48

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A Practicum Report Presented to the
Master's Program in Child and Youth Care Administration
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Science

NOVA UNIVERSITY

1993

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AUTHORSHIP STATEMENT

I hereby testify that this paper and the work it reports are entirely my own. Where it has been necessary to draw from the work of others, published or unpublished, I have acknowledged such work in accordance with accepted scholarly and editorial practice. I give this testimony freely, out of respect for the scholarship of other workers in the field and in the hope that my own work, presented here, will earn similar respect.

MARCH 22, 1993.
Date

George Ray
Signature of Student

ABSTRACT

The development and implementation of a group social skills program for emotionally disturbed children in a special education school. Roy, George W., 1993: Practicum Report, Nova University, Master's Program for Child and Youth Care Administrators. Descriptors: Social Skills in Children/ Applied Social Learning Theory/ Behavioral Assessment of Children/ Teaching Social Skills in Groups/ Social Skills - Study and Teaching.

The Agency's special education school had recently begun to provide services to children other than those who are living in, and receiving treatment from the residential component of the program. At the time of the study the school served twenty such "day students." The students were emotionally and behaviourally disturbed children who had been expelled from other special school programs across the city. They were referred to the Agency's school program by the city's school board central placement committee.

The author worked with the teachers and the administration staff of the Agency's school to create a new program to address some of the unusual needs presented by this group of day students. In the past, the school had the ongoing support of the Child Care Workers from the residential cottages. These Child Care Workers provided support and respite for the school staff and they also provided conjoint treatment to each student during the out-of-school hours of each day. The day students in the study did not have a residential treatment program close at hand.

A small group (3) format was used to teach and to practice fundamental social skills necessary for coping with the classroom environment. Each group of three children was set up on the basis of similar developmental levels and social compatibility. A group remained together for three weeks, during which time they spent a part of each week away from their regular classroom working together on fundamental social skills. In addition, all of the school staff were trained in the curriculum content so they could assist with generalization from the program back to the home classroom.

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Chapter I

BACKGROUND

The Setting

The practicum setting was a large, multidisciplinary, residential and community-based, treatment agency situated in a city in western Canada. The Agency, which is private and non-profit, has been delivering mental health services to emotionally disturbed children and their families since 1963. The majority of the approximately 135 children, who were receiving services at the time of the practicum, were eligible for those services under the provisions of the province's child welfare legislation. The Agency also provided services to a few children under the provisions of The Young Offenders' Act and to a very few special needs, out-of-province children. The Agency's residential campus land and its buildings, which include seven, twelve-bed, treatment cottages, a modern school and a large administration complex are owned outright by the Agency. However, ninety percent of the Agency's operating revenues were derived from annual contracts which were negotiated with the provincial government.

The Agency's special education school, which is located on the residential campus, offered individualized educational

programs for students from age six to age eighteen. The school was under the local city school board's authority and it was staffed, in part, by school board teachers and administrators. School board personnel who worked in the Agency's school held dual appointments with the board and the Agency. The school's principal was a member of the Agency management team. The principal reported to the Agency Director who in turn reported to the Board of Governors.

At the time of the implementation phase of the project the school served fifty children. The children were divided into six classroom groupings which were based primarily on student chronological age. Classroom group sizes ranged from as few as four to as many as twelve. Each classroom was staffed by at least one teacher and by at least two adults. The second adult was either another teacher, a child care worker or a teacher assistant.

Of the fifty students in the school program, thirty were also receiving treatment in one of the Agency's residential treatment programs. The remaining twenty students were day students, which means that they lived in private homes in the community and that they were transported back and forth from their homes each day to attend the Agency's special school program.

Serving day students, who were not simultaneously receiving other treatment services from the Agency, was a relatively new experience for the Agency's school personnel. Because provincial funding support for residential treatment was being reduced, the school had recently begun to seek out other, non-residential populations of students who had similar intensive treatment

needs.

The Author's Role in the Setting

During the practicum period the author was a senior Child Care Worker attached to the staff group which provided the residential component of the Agency's treatment programs. The author coordinated a treatment foster care program specifically for long-term, dually diagnosed children who had completed a course of residential treatment at the Agency and who subsequently required a less restrictive, community-based foster placement.

In addition, the author provided some inservice training for the treatment staff of the Agency's residential programs. For seven years, during a seventeen year tenure with the Agency the author was responsible, full-time, for the Agency's staff development services. It was primarily because of the author's years of experience as a trainer and a program consultant that he was invited to join the Agency school's program development team to assist in the creation of this new school-based program.

Chapter II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

The Problem

Although the Agency's school provided its twenty new Day Students with special education teachers, small classroom groupings, and child care workers or teacher assistants in each classroom for additional support, the additional resources were simply not sufficient to meet the extraordinary needs of those children. Consequently, the Day Students also frequently required additional extended periods of one-to-one, out of the classroom, intervention for support, counselling, and problem solving to help them to stabilize emotionally and to return to their classrooms.

The Day Students lacked the necessary skills to cope with even the most basic classroom social demands. Because they were so deficit, they spent too small a percentage of their school time engaged in productive, on-task, student-like behaviours. During those times when they could not cope in a student-like manner with the demands of their classroom, they became extremely disruptive and distracted the other students in their own classroom and throughout the school. While they were in this failure to cope state they also consumed significant amounts of time from

skillful adult resource persons.

Prior to the commencement of the project, the entire school staff already devoted much of their time to teaching and reinforcing those basic social skills which are necessary for coping with the social demands of a special education classroom. All the support and instruction that already existed was still not sufficient to meet the needs of the school's Day Student population.

In order to more effectively serve the needs of the Day Students a more focused and intensive approach to teaching social skills for the classroom, and encouraging the more frequent use of such skills, had to be employed. Ideally the Day Students should have been devoting their school time to learning valuable, academic survival skills, instead they actually were escaping from their classrooms because even the minimal social demands in those sheltered settings was often too much for them.

Documentation of the Problem

Hard evidence abounded, which substantiated the existence of a consequential discrepancy between the Day Students' actual repertoires of interpersonal skills and the array of skills which would have been ideal for them. For example, the numbers of Critical Incidents generated by the Day Students during a one month period were collected (See Appendix A.). A Critical Incident was defined by the school as dangerous misbehavior of unusual seriousness and intensity. It was behavior that skillful, one-to-one, counseling failed to curtail. It often involved dangerous assaultive actions directed at other children or adults in the milieu. During the month in question there were thirty-six such Critical Incidents in twenty school days or 1.8 Critical In-

cidents per day. Three children had six or eight each, twelve children had either one or two, and five had no incidents during the month. These simple data verified that there were fifteen students in that group who had not been able to attend school for twenty consecutive days without assaulting someone.

During the eight weeks prior to the actual implementation of the project, the author attended the Day Program's weekly staff meetings. The meetings were chaired by the school's Vice Principal. They usually involved the five Day Program line staff, the school's six teacher assistants, one teacher and the Principal and/or the Assistant Principal. A regular part of each meeting was devoted to focused, group problem solving, concentrating on the needs of a select few of the twenty Day Students who had been evidencing the most extreme levels of difficulty during the preceding week. During each meeting there was an abundance of anecdotal evidence from the twelve direct-service staff who were present, of the breath and the severity of those children's needs.

McGinnis, Goldstein, Sprafkin, & Gershaw (1984) published a social skills inventory which they titled Teacher Skill Checklist. The inventory names and briefly defines sixty social skills which are commonly used by children in the classroom. For the purposes of systematically sampling the behavior observations of the Day Program line staff and the teacher assistants, a brief questionnaire was constructed by selecting fourteen of the most relevant skill items from the Teacher Skill Checklist (See Appendix B.). The questionnaire was designed to provide a preliminary overview of the perceived range and severity of the social skills

deficits present in the Day Student group.

The eleven members of the support staff group (Day Program staff and teacher assistants) were first asked to describe each of the twenty Day Student's current, primary, behavior problem in the school. Once the initial part of the questionnaire was completed, then they were asked to indicate which three of the fourteen listed skills were most deficit in each of the Day Students. Their answers were tabulated and summarized. The skills titled: Knowing Their Feelings, Using Self-Control, and Deciding What Caused A Problem were selected most often, they were followed by: Staying Out Of Fights, Asking For Help, and Joining In. It seems important to add that although the first part of the questionnaire asked for... "primary problem behaviour in school," for more than half of the children some complex, chronic, family problem was named or added parenthetically.

The school's teaching staff also completed the questionnaire. They most often selected: Following Instructions, Ignoring Distractions, and Using Self-Control as the most profound deficits, followed by: Dealing With Their Anger, Deciding What Caused A Problem, and Knowing Their Feelings.

Another way to quantify the intensity of the problem came from a new book by Horne & Sayger (1990). In their introduction they outlined the diagnostic criteria for Conduct Disorder in Children (1990, p.2). The preamble states:

> The diagnostic criteria for conduct disorder (APA, 1987) are: A disturbance of conduct lasting at least six months in which at least three of the following (they then provide a list of thirteen significant problem behaviors)

have been present.

The list of thirteen significant behavior problems includes at least six which occurred several times daily in the Day Student population. The behaviors listed below are six of the thirteen which occurred at particularly high rates:

#13) Has been physically cruel to people

#11) Often initiates physical fights

#7) Has deliberately destroyed others' property

#3) Often lies

#2) Has run away from home overnight at least twice

#1) Has stolen on more than one occasion (without confrontation of a victim)

Each of the twenty Day Students clearly exceeded the level of behavior disturbance necessary to be diagnosed as having a Conduct Disorder.

In summary, the Day Students presented a significant new challenge for the staff of the Agency's school. First, they came from families who possessed few physical and emotional resources with which to support their children's efforts in school. Second, they had not acquired basic social skills so they found themselves in constant conflict with other people: their peers, their families, their taxi drivers, and their teachers. Third, they already had long histories of failing at school. They had failed both academically and socially in school. School, with its demands for compliance, cooperation and focused thinking, had become an increasingly unattractive place for them to be.

Causal Analysis

The unusual concentration of twenty Day Students, each with

such extraordinary needs, in a single school with only fifty students in total, could be explained in part by the recently mandated role which the school had chosen to play within the urban region which it served. The school had offered to become one of a very few "school placements of last resort" in a catchment area of almost seven hundred thousand people.

The existing economic conditions in western Canada had contributed to the outright loss or the significant down sizing of a number of other specialized programs for children with special educational and treatment needs. Each year, from 1986 to 1992 there had been significant reductions in government spending in this critical children's services area. Consequently, the Agency's school, operating on a reduced budget, was one of only a few remaining programs which was willing to attempt to address the needs of those children who had already used up most of the other traditional school placements which the school board had to offer.

Naturally, the city school board's placement committee was very conscious of the shrinking number of last resort school placements which it had at its disposal. In an effort to get the very best return for their investment in the Agency's school, the board only referred those students whose needs were clearly extraordinary. There was simply no room in the Day Program for a student whose needs could be meet in some other less intensive school-based setting.

For virtually all the students in the Day Program, their school related difficulties were not the most burdensome problem which they confronted each day. Those students were also faced

with the exigencies of coping in multi-problem family situations. The adult members of their families were often immobilized by their own unresolved problems and were therefore not capable of providing much of the necessary parenting support to their child. Because the city's family support programs were also faced with similar severe financial constraints, fewer than half of the twenty families of students in the Day Program were receiving family-based support.

Review of the Literature

A review of the latest theoretical writings on the topic of social skills indicated that the advent of children's social skills as an important area of study was a relatively recent development (Matson & Ollendick, 1988). It was only within the last fifteen years that well defined, and clearly specified, assessment and treatment techniques for children had been developed (Dodge, 1989). Since children's social skills was first introduced as a topic for study, there has been a geometric growth in the professional recognition of this area as a critical one for greater attention in child development research and in various types of clinical practice.

Most recent scholarly books, devoted to the subject of social skills, begin with an attempt by the author to describe the most consequential early developments in the evolution of today's social skills training systems. Hollin & Trower (1986), for example, identify three relatively independent early developments as containing the origins of social skills training: the emergence of the early behaviour therapy work of Joseph Wolpe; research into the relationship between social competence and mild

to severe psychiatric disorders; and the conclusions drawn from research in social psychology concerning verbal and nonverbal communication.

It is clear that social skills play a critical role in children's social adjustment (Csapo, 1987). Inadequate social skills in children have been directly related to dropping out of school, juvenile delinquency, mental health problems and adjustment with peers at school and in the community (Matson & Ollendick, 1988). Children with poor peer relationships not only are at risk for later psychological problems, but also are likely to have difficulties in school and to be over represented in referrals to children's mental health services (Dodge, 1989).

Although there appears to be considerable correlational evidence that social skills are a very important predictor of social adjustment, there is still not much consensus concerning the origins of social maladaptation. Kenneth Dodge points out this important, missing, piece of theoretical formulation when he discusses the process of identifying possible targets for treatment intervention. He writes:

> Even though a theory of social incompetence would seem to be a prerequisite for the development of treatments for these children, many interventions have proceeded without a systematic understanding of the nature of these problems. Often, the goals of the intervention are determined intuitively or by their face validity. (Dodge, 1989, p. 226)

Dodge and his colleagues have used a model of social information processing in an attempt to describe skill categories which are critical for successful social interaction, and there-

fore logical areas for intervention through social skills training. Their four categories are:

> 1) the accurate interpretation of social situations and others' intentions;
>
> 2) the generation and selection of appropriate and competent behavioral responses to specific situations;
>
> 3) the skillful enactment of behavioral strategies; and
>
> 4) the monitoring and adjustment of one's own behavior according to environmental demands. (Dodge, 1989, p. 232)

The conceptual basis for many important social skills training programs is social learning theory. A social learning theory model offers the following facile explanations for why certain children fail to act adaptively in social situations:

1) the child may not know what the appropriate behaviour is (the child was not exposed sufficiently to appropriate social models),

2) the child may have the knowledge, but may lack sufficient practice,

3) the child's emotional responses ([sic] the child's mental disorder) may inhibit the performance of the desirable behaviour, or

4) the child may not perform the required skill due to a lack of motivation (McGinnis et al., 1984; Liberman, DeRisi, & Mueser, 1989; Matson & Ollendick, 1988).

Goldstein (1988), who has contributed immeasurably to our present understanding of social skills training, writes that:

> ...perhaps psychology's most direct contribution to psychological skills training came from social learning

theory, and in particular from the work conducted and stimulated by Albert Bandura (pp. 6-7). (See Bandura, 1986).

Social skills training has particularly broad appeal and applicability since it relates to most emotional and adjustment problems of children (Dodge, 1989). One reason socials skills has attracted so much recent attention from so many different professional groups is that the topic cuts across the lines of a number of different professional disciplines and theoretical approaches within disciplines. Perhaps the universality of its appeal comes from the fact that the most reinforcing and the most punishing human experiences unfold in the context of interpersonal relationships (Csapo, 1987).

It also appears that socially rejected children, even those who are not formally identified as having severe problems, are likely to report being extremely lonely and unhappy. The research indicates that at least half of the children in this group do not resolve their problems and so they remain socially rejected over several years (Dodge, 1989).

North American schools have been officially concerned with children who have social problems since 1871 when a special education class for truant, disobedient and insubordinate children first opened in New Haven, Connecticut (Apter & Close-Conoley, 1984).

Cartledge & Fellows-Milburn (1986) describe three major conditions within our society that have made it necessary for schools to assume greater amounts of responsibility for teaching social skills and concepts. They indicate that our culture's increased concern with individuality, our increased mobility, and

the dramatic changes which continue to occur in our primary social institutions (homes, schools and churches) have contributed to our reduced effectiveness as socializing agents for our children.

McGinnis et al., in the Introduction to their book entitled Skill-Streaming the Elementary School Child, describe how teachers have had to stop focusing on the three Rs and instead turn their attention to the more basic social skills deficits:

> Many teachers in today's school systems find themselves spending much of their time dealing with playground conflict, hallway and cafeteria disruptions, off task behavior within the classroom itself, and much more. Many educators are concluding that the time spent trying to deal with these behavior problems can be better employed in teaching children how to prevent conflicts or deal with them in an effective, socially acceptable manner. The field of special education, in particular, is beginning to recognize the importance of providing students with instruction in problem-reducing and problem-avoiding prosocial and affective skills and competencies (1984, p. 2).

It is clear that McGinnis et al. believe that the teaching of social skills should be a part of all mainstream and special education programs. They indicate that simply making students aware of particular behaviors that are unacceptable is not enough, teachers must actually teach the constructive skillful alternatives as well.

In general, the recent scholarly literature on the topic of children's social skills suggests that children who are socially

incompetent can look forward to conflict-filled lives which are more lonely and less productive than they would be if those children had acquired critical social skills.

Social skills certainly influence a child's life at school. Unskillful children experience increased amounts of conflict and isolation, they are viewed as socially unattractive and so they miss many important in-school social experiences. If for no other reason than self-preservation, schools have begun to address the social skills deficits of their students. Most school-based interventions have been focused on either altering specific behavior patterns or on teaching more general social-cognitive skills. Simply speaking, the behavioral interventions show good initial results but don't seem to generalize adequately. The newer social-cognitive interventions are more difficult to implement, show greater promise, and have not yet been sufficiently validated.

Chapter III

GOALS AND OUTCOME OBJECTIVES

The goal of this practicum, based upon a study of the problem which was outlined in Chapter II, was to create an effective, remedial, social skills learning experience for children selected from the Agency school's Day Program.

The implementation phase of the practicum was ten weeks long. The following objectives (subgoals) were projected for this practicum:

1. To devise a developmentally appropriate series of experiences designed to promote student utilization of prosocial behaviors in the classroom.

This objective will be considered to have been achieved when the detailed lesson plans for the learning experiences have been signed off by the students' home room teacher(s) and by the Vice Principal who is responsible for the project. The school staff will be asked to evaluate each learning activity to ensure that it is developmentally suitable for the students who are selected to take part. (Note: The twenty Day Students range in age from 8-2 to 16-4 which would normally mean a developmental span from Grades 3 to 11.)

2. To provide a similar series of experiences to at least 50 percent of the students enrolled in the Day Program.

Attainment of this objective will be measured by recording detailed attendance histories for each student. A student who is present for at least 85 percent of the total duration of the program will be considered to have completed the program.

3. To explain the theory base and the actual content of the experiences (the skill elements) to the school staff.

Attainment of this objective will be measured by a staff questionnaire. The school staff will be asked to evaluate the explanations which were provided to them concerning the content and the theoretical basis for the social skills program. If the data from the questionnaire indicates that at least 75 percent of the staff were satisfied with the information which was provided the objective will be considered to have been achieved.

4. To gain school staff support for the continuation of the "social skills project" after the pilot period has been completed.

At the conclusion of the implementation phase, school staff opinions will be surveyed regarding the perceived utility of continuing the project for the remainder of the academic year. This objective will be considered achieved if at least 75 percent of the staff approve, by secret ballot, the continuation of the project.

Chapter IV

SOLUTION STRATEGIES

Existing Models and Programs

The social skills literature contains a variety of theoretical explanations for the development of social skills. Csapo (1987) briefly describes five different theoretical orientations: a) psychodynamic, b) developmental, c) learning theory, d) ecological theory, and e) systems theory.

Matson & Ollendick, in their chapter entitled Treatment Approaches, ignore the non-behavioral models and focus instead on "the major theoretical camps" within the behavioral movement. They conclude that, "In general, the treatments for social skills are behaviorally based and theory bound" (Matson & Ollendick, 1988, p. 39). They highlight operant conditioning, cognitive behavior therapy, and social learning theory as the most relevant models to guide social skills training.

Goldstein (1988), in a brief historical sketch of social skills theory and practice in the 1970's, defines three important theoretical clusters of treatment interventions: a) psychodynamic/ psychoanalytic, b) humanistic/ client-centered, and c) behavior modification. The first two groups used various

techniques to unblock or uncover latent desirable behaviours while the behaviour modifiers, who aligned with the third camp, employed a variety of contingency management procedures to shape and promote adaptive behaviors.

Goldstein believes that it was from those early practitioners' efforts that the modern skill trainer's treatment repertoire evolved. Social skills remediators in the 1990's are not involved in interpretation, reflection or reinforcement but rather in the active and deliberate teaching of desirable social behavior.

Dodge (1989) constructs a six stage model of assessment and intervention for social incompetence in children (p. 229). He acknowledges the power of changing contingencies to alter specific social behavioral patterns but he concludes that the generalization of such changes to other natural settings has been disappointing. From his review of the literature, Dodge concludes that training in social-cognitive skills offers better potential long-term outcomes.

Frank M. Gresham and his associates have published an important series of articles and book chapters which span the 1980's and up to the present (Gresham, 1986). Gresham employs a social learning theory model and the cognitive-behavior procedures which have been derived from it. He precises the model in the following manner:

> In sum, social learning theory emphasizes the role of both cognitive and environmental influences in determining behavior. Environmental influences are considered to be mediated by cognitive processes (e.g., perception, attribu-

tion, etc.) As such, the direction of influence between the organism and the environment is bi-directional as they mutually and reciprocally influence each other (Gresham & Lemanek, 1984, p. 441).

Gresham continues to push for a more complete and effective model for conceptualizing social skills. He identifies the two polar opposite approaches which have been taken in the past:

1) The Trait Model, which views social skills as an underlying, cross-situational response predisposition; and

2) The Molecular Model which views social skills as discrete, situation-specific behaviors with no reference to an underlying personality characteristic or trait (1986, p. 144).

Gresham summarizes the theoretical situation, as it was from his perspective, in 1986:

> There is obviously a need for rapprochement between the trait and molecular models of social skill. Perhaps a conceptualization that is intermediately placed on the trait-molecular continuum would be the most useful. Unfortunately, such a model has to date not been forthcoming. As such, social skill remains a construct in need of further conceptualization and theoretical refinement (1986, p. 145).

When one considers, together, the recent publications by Csapo, Dodge, Goldstein, Gresham, Matson & Ollendick and McGinnis and her colleagues, several important themes seem to emerge. They seem to agree that there are effective ways to teach children social skills. The research which they review shows that it is possible to get robust treatment effects. All the authors also

foresee a very positive and innovative future for social skills practice and research. However, they also agree that treatment has gotten too far ahead of necessary theory-building. They worry that too many important decisions about what to focus on in treatment have been made simply by informed guessing. For the practitioner, in the mean time, it seems that a carefully thought out program based upon cognitive-behavioral and social learning principles and procedures cannot be too far off the ultimate mark.

Solution Strategy

This solution strategy was founded upon a series of compromises and "educated" guesses. It seems likely that behavioral interventions will continue to dominate the social skills remediation arena. It also appears that the best new social skills programs will include more social-cognitive skill development strategies. On the other hand, effective programs will probably stop relying on simple contingency change procedures and the shaping of single-simple skills. Effective program curricula will also reflect the better assessment of individual child needs and the translation of those needs into individualized interventions.

For the purposes of the initial practicum (pilot) phase of this program, the interventions or learning experiences will be organized around the following ten program guidelines. The learning experiences which are selected and presented will be:

1.) Based on the frequencies of behavioral excesses and behavioral deficits which are actually exhibited by the Day Student population in the school setting.

2.) Based on an evolving taxonomy of problematic social tasks.

Those tasks will be identified, in part, by the school staff and the Day Students themselves.

3.) Based on learning experiences which can occur most effectively in small groups. The groups will be composed of peers from the Day Student roster, to promote generalization from the program to related natural settings.

4.) Based on combinations of learning experiences which include behavior modification, specific skill instruction, and more complex learning strategies designed to promote the development of social-cognitive skills.

5.) Based on experiences which are multimodal (visual, auditory, experiential and experimental) and developmentally appropriate. (Experiences which require extensive amounts of reading and writing will be kept to a minimum.)

6.) Based on curriculum Strands which present the same topic or complex social behavior to small groups of children at different social and cognitive levels of development. In other words, the topic will be the same but the cognitive level of the learning experiences will be quite different.

7.) Based on a concern for student motivation. Natural and artificial incentives will be sought out and employed to maximize student motivation.

8.) Based on learning experiences which include formal and informal components. (The informal component might include group photos, group social outings, food sharing and group T-shirts.)

9.) Based on a recognition of the need for transfer- and maintenance-enhancing procedures to ensure generalization.

10.) Based on a program philosophy which requires that the Social

Skills program be fully integrated with all the other programs which the school offers to its students.

Plan for Implementation

The actions and activities necessary for implementing this proposal are organized into Tasks A. through C. The work on each task will progress concurrently during the ten weeks of the implementation period. The summative evaluation of the final objectives will be completed and presented in written form after the implementation phase.

Task A.

To devise a developmentally appropriate series of experiences designed to promote student utilization of prosocial behaviors in the classroom.

Step 1:

Define the critical pieces of theory which will guide what is done, how it is done, and why it is done that way.

Responsible Individual:

The literature review will be the responsibility of the author. The author will collect and itemize the critical pieces of theory from the literature. The school's administration team will have final approval of any program implemented within the school setting.

Time Required:

A provisional theory base must be in place before the first week of the implementation phase.

Step 2:

Define and detail out the first Strands. A Strand is a com-

plex social behavior which is composed of a variety of social skills. The program's curriculum will be made up of several of these major unifying themes or Strands. The first Strand, for example, will be Social Problem Solving.

Social Problem Solving will be the unifying, overall goal (the social behavior). All students who complete this Strand, from the youngest to the oldest, and from the most mature to the most immature, will learn developmentally appropriate social skills which contribute directly to enhanced Social Problem Solving. They will all be learning about the same Strand but from different levels that are developmentally suitable for individual students.

Responsible Individual:

The literature review, the collated responses from the staff questionnaires, the school's critical incident records, and standardized social skills inventories will all be used to provide information to guide Strand selection. The final decision will be shared between the author and the Vice Principal.

Time Required:

The second Strand must be identified by the end of the initial implementation phase.

Step 3:

Define a functional reading level for each student in the Day Program. Reading levels and chronological age are critical variables in the selection of developmentally appropriate instructional materials. Typically, as the reading age and the chronological age become more discrepant the problem of finding suitable learning materials becomes more difficult.

Responsible Individual:

Standardized educational tests are routinely administered by the Agency's psychometrist and the results are on file. Students report cards and teacher testing results are also on file. Functional reading levels will be assigned by the Vice Principal and the author with reference to the appropriate test scores and the observations of the child's teachers.

Time Required:

Reading levels must be assessed and assigned before the end of the first week of implementation.

Step 4:

Select a range of learning experiences which take into account, the theory base from Step 1, the topic or theme (which is called a Strand) from Step 2, and the developmental levels from Step 3.

Responsible Individual:

Preliminary selections of potential learning experiences will be made by both the author and the Vice Principal independently. Final selections will be arrived at jointly.

Time Required:

Lesson Plans for the first five Groups must be completed by the end of week five of implementation.

Step 5:

The individual learning experiences from Step 4 must be integrated together into a series of repeating patterns or lesson plans.

Responsible Individual:

Lesson Plans, particularly the first five sets for the initial pilot study will be prepared jointly by the author and the Vice Principal.

Time Required:

Lesson Plans for the first five Groups must be completed by the end of week five of implementation.

Step 6:

The seven Lesson Plans for Groups 1 - 5 must be approved by the teaching staff and signed off by the Vice Principal.

Responsible Individual:

The author will continue to make lesson plan revisions until they are properly signed off.

Time Required:

Lesson Plans for the first five Groups must be completed by the end of week five of implementation.

TASK B.

Select five small Groups of students, from the twenty Day Students, to attend the first five pilot groups of the Social Skills Program.

Step 1:

Define the characteristics of the Groups which should be used for the pilot study. For example, the five homogeneous groups could include, three young students, three old students, three students with the most social skills deficits, three with the least skill deficits or three of the most aggressive children.

Responsible Individual:

Groups will be selected after the five group types have been decided upon. Group types will be selected by the author and the Vice Principal. Staff group input will strongly influence the selection of particular children to a particular group.

Time Required:

Group composition must be known early in Week I.

Step 2:

Based on the group types which are defined from Step 1, select five groups of students. A Group is two or three students who are close to the same level of academic development and who are reasonably socially compatible.

Responsible Individual:

The teachers and the Day Program staff will provide the "student characteristics" information. The final decision will be shared by the Vice Principal and the author.

Time Required:

Group composition must be known early in Week I.

Task C.

Familiarize the school staff with the critical components of the Social Skills Program.

Note:

The entire school staff group has been regularly updated on the progress of the project since it was first proposed. The first formal presentation to a school staff meeting occurred six week prior to the beginning of implementation. The second presentation to the full staff group occurred three weeks prior to the

commencement of implementation.

Step 1:

Using the results from Task A. Step 1, the author will prepare a written summary of the theory base upon which the program will be based. The written summary will be one part of a formal mini-workshop which the author and the Vice Principal will provide to the school staff.

Responsible Individual:

The author will be responsible for preparing the written materials and the workshop overheads. The workshop will be co-presented by the author and the Vice Principal.

Time Required:

This workshop must be ready to be presented during Week III. of the implementation period.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN CALENDAR

Week I.

- Complete physical arrangements in the classroom.
- Send written notification to parents/guardians
- Finalize the composition of the five Groups.
- Complete the seven Lesson Plans for Group One.

Week II.

- Complete the seven Lesson Plans for Group Two.

Week III.

- Complete the seven Lesson Plans for Group Three.
- Final authorization by the school's Principal.
- Update the entire school staff re: progress.

Week IV.

- Start Group 1.
- Complete the seven Lesson Plans for Group Four.

Week V.

- Start Group 2.
- Complete the seven Lesson Plans for Group Five.

Week VI.

- Start Group 3. End Group 1.

Week VII.

- Start Group 4. End Group 2.
- Evaluation of Group 1.

Week VIII.

- Start Group 5. End Group 3.
- Evaluation of Group 2.

Week IX.

- End Group 4.
- Evaluation of Group 3.

Week X.

- End Group 5.
- Evaluation of Group 4.

Week XI.

- Presentation of preliminary results and conclusions to the school staff group.
- Complete the summative evaluation processes.

Week XII.

- Preparation of the final report.

Report of the Action Taken

What follows is a brief summary of the actual action taken to implement the solution strategies that were described in the previous sections of this chapter. Virtually all the planned activities were carried out according to the plan but compliance with the planned time lines was not always precise.

The twenty Day Students were placed in preliminary groupings of three students per training group. The seven potential groups were arranged by asking teachers, teacher assistants, Day Program workers, and the school's administration team to consider and to suggest any reasonable alternative configuration which would produce the most socially compatible groups that were also at a relatively similar level of academic functioning. A preliminary grouping had to remain somewhat tentative, until it was their turn to begin, to accommodate any subsequent changes to the enrollment in the Day Program. For example, one Day Student was placed in residential care, at the Agency, during the implementation period and so he became simultaneously ineligible to continue in the Day Program.

All twenty of the Day Students were placed in an initial grouping because the long term plan for the project involved the school's Vice Principal providing the training for the remaining eight Day Students (the last three groups) as soon as the initial implementation phase was complete. Final groupings were approved by the Vice Principal during the week prior to that group's first day in the project.

The order in which groups were selected to begin was determined in part by a desire to experience the full range of student

need and ability during the (pilot) implementation period. The demands of other necessary school activities also influenced when a particular group could begin. Downhill Ski Week for all area schools and the timing of the annual Teachers' Convention disrupted the original sequencing plan. However, by the end of the implementation phase more than fifty percent of the Day Students had been through the program.

Twelve of the twenty Day Students were served during the implementation period. The students went through the program in four groups, each composed of three students. Eleven of the twelve students who participated were boys. The four groups could be described as: a) the youngest students, b) the oldest students, c) the student with the most significant developmental delays, and d) the most socially adept group.

Lesson plans for the first five groups were prepared. Appendix D contains a list commercially available curriculum materials and teaching resources which served as the basis for most of the student activities contained in the finalized lesson plans.

Lesson planning proved to be a challenging task. The students' limited academic skills and their significant, ongoing, behavioral and emotional problems made predicting what tasks they could or would do and how long it would take them to complete each task very difficult. In most instances the results of presenting a particular lesson, to a particular group, would lead to significant revisions in the plans for the next lesson. Actual lesson planning could not occur far in advance or in isolation from the changing needs of a particular group and their behavior during previous group sessions. Most of the lesson plans that ul-

timately were delivered were actually finalized the day before they were presented.

Each group received ten hours of instruction during the seven lessons. The topics for each group were the same. The methods of instruction and the materials and activities used were selected and modified to meet the needs of each group.

The groups meet in an empty classroom (Room Two) in the Agency's school. The physical setting was ideal. It was very close to the students' home rooms and it was a setting which was familiar to them. The space was large, bright, clean, appropriately furnished and equipped, and generally very attractive and pleasant. The author and the Vice Principal redecorated the room to match its new purpose and rearranged the furnishings to suit the needs of a succession of small student groups. The school also provided a generous budget for curriculum materials and instructional aids. All of the resources listed in Appendix D. were purchased specifically for use by the project participants.

During a group's first week it would be in the classroom for four sessions, Tuesday to Friday from 8:45 AM until 10:30 AM. During its second week there would be two sessions, Tuesday and Thursday from 11:00 AM until 12:00. During the third and final week the group would have one session on Wednesday from 11:00 AM until 12:00. This arrangement allowed for a new group to begin each week and for three separate groups to be operating simultaneously.

All the groups were co-instructed by the author and the Vice-Principal. Occasionally one of the Day Program staff would

join a group to provide additional behavior management support or simply to be a participant observer and to take part in the ongoing group activity.

Each lesson followed a similar pattern. Students were greeted warmly upon their arrival and assisted with putting away coats, winter boots and any other distracting items they might have in their possession. Everyone was then seated, either at a circular table or in a circle on the floor. The lesson opened with a brief sharing time. Students each had the opportunity to talk about their life events leading up to their arrival in the classroom. Then, the first of five or six short instructional activities would be introduced. The activities typically involved listening to stories and answering questions, watching an instructional video tape, doing a craft-like activity involving feelings, role playing feeling situations, playing feeling games, discussing alternate ways to solve a particular problem or solving a real problem which had developed in the classroom.

After two or three of the day's activities were completed the students would have an in-classroom break. The younger children would have a snack and an opportunity to play with some special toys like a Batmobile. The older children would have a snack at the table and just socialize informally for a few minutes.

At the end of the class period the children would be reminded of the time and day for their next session. They would be given their school program points or the required written feedback concerning their behavior during the time they were in the project classroom. They would then gather up their belongings

and move back to their regular home room activities.

Each group went through a parallel series of experiences in the sequence outlined below:

Lesson 1.

- Orientation to the project. Its goals and its activities.
- Group rules and norms for students involved in the project.
- Assessment of the group's cognitive and academic skills and an appraisal of the developing group dynamics as the newly formed group engaged in the various activities.

Lessons 2, 3, and 4.

- Identifying a range of feelings.
- Identifying "good and bad" feelings.
- Identifying "comfortable and uncomfortable" feelings.
- Identifying feelings in self and others.

Lessons 5 and 6.

- Understanding and expressing feelings. The connections between feelings, thoughts and actions.

Lesson 7.

- Managing particular feelings.
- Managing anger, frustration and peer slights and set-ups.
- The role of feelings, thoughts and actions on behavior.

The regular Friday afternoon school staff meetings were used for the formal presentations to the entire school staff group and as an efficient way to collect data from all members of the school team. Most of the teachers also found additional time to discuss the program informally, particularly during those times when students from their classrooms were actively involved.

The final presentation to the school staff group took place on the Friday afternoon of the last (tenth) week of the implementation period. It was during that final meeting that the school staff formally reported their current understanding of the project and when they voted to continue or discontinue the project past the pilot phase.

Chapter V

RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Results

At the time of the practicum study the Agency's school was serving twenty Day Students. The students were emotionally and behaviorally disturbed children who had been expelled from other special school programs in the city. A small group teaching format was used to teach and to practice the fundamental social skills necessary for coping with the demands of a classroom environment.

Twelve of the twenty Day Students participated in the intervention phase of the practicum project. The results of the intervention, based upon the responses from the school staff and the number of students who participated successfully, indicated that the goals and the outcome objectives were clearly achieved.

Each small student group was presented with a seven session, ten hour long, program designed to promote their utilization of prosocial behaviors in their classrooms. The twenty five members of the school staff group indicated, at the conclusion of the intervention, that they understood the theory base and the actual content of the program and that they strongly supported its con-

tinuation.

Four specific outcome measures were devised to provide an array of preliminary evaluation data. Each measure and its results are presented below:

1. To devise a developmentally appropriate series of experiences designed to promote student utilization of prosocial behaviors in the classroom.

Lesson plans for more than fifty hours of instruction were devised. Each of the four small groups received ten hours of instruction. Most lesson plans included alternate and supplementary activity ideas to account for last minute changes in student need or motivation.

Classroom teachers played a less significant role in the actual selection of particular exercises for a given lesson than was called for in the initial plan. Once a teacher had provided the child's estimated grade-equivalent reading level and a few recent samples of their written work no other more specific information was required to produce appropriate lesson plans. When more information was requested from the teacher it was invariably related to successful behavior management strategies as opposed to teaching strategies.

The author co-instructed the lessons with the school's Vice Principal. The Vice Principal had very detailed, previous knowledge of each of the Day Students. The Vice Principal applied that knowledge during the construction and the subsequent approval of each of the final lesson plans.

2. To provide a similar series of experiences to at least 50 percent of the students enrolled in the Day Program.

Sixty percent (12) of the students enrolled in the Day Program completed the program. Attainment of this objective was measured by recording detailed attendance histories for each student. A student who was present for at least 85 percent of the total duration of the program (eight hours and thirty minutes) was considered to have completed the program. All twelve students met the attendance criterion.

3. To explain the theory base and the actual content of the experiences (the skill elements) to the school staff.

Attainment of this objective was measured by a staff questionnaire. The school staff were asked to evaluate the explanations which were provided to them concerning the content and the theoretical basis for the social skills program. If the data from the questionnaire indicated that at least 75 percent of the staff were satisfied with the information which was provided the objective was to be considered to have been achieved. Eighty-four (84) percent indicated they understood the overall goals and the theoretical orientation. Similarly, eighty-four (84) percent indicated the were satisfied with their understanding of the actual experiential content of the program.

4. To gain school staff support for the continuation of the "social skills project" after the pilot period has been completed.

At the conclusion of the implementation phase, school staff opinions were surveyed regarding the perceived utility of continuing the project for the remainder of the academic year. This objective was to be considered achieved if at least 75 percent of the staff approved, by secret ballot, the continuation of the

project. The final staff balloting produced a ninety-two (92) percent approval rating for continuation of the project.

Discussion and Conclusions

The literature review, which provided the theoretical basis for this project, clearly indicates that social skills play a critical role in children's social adjustment. The social demands which arise when a child goes to school provide an important test of that child's skills in a significant social arena. The twenty Day Students, who were the subjects for this project, represent an extreme sample of children whose limited social skills impeded their social adjustment in the school context. The extent of the adjustment difficulties among the Day Students were such that they had already used up all of the remediation resources of a large urban school board which serves seven hundred thousand people.

Therefore, it seems reasonable to conclude that the problem which has been defined during the process of this practicum is both real and significant. The solution strategies which have been proposed and piloted to respond to this problem, carry considerable amounts of face validity. Twenty-three of a group of twenty-five experienced and talented special educators endorsed, by secret ballot, the continuation of this project beyond its pilot stage.

However, face validity is simply not enough of a measure of efficacy to sustain a project of this nature. The project's facilitators and the school's administration team need to know what, exactly, each child has learned through participating in the project. They need reliable demonstrations of real behavior

change. Change which is being consistently exhibited in school classrooms and out in the community. The school board's Special Programs Funding Committee will want to know how much this project contributes to shortening the necessary length of stay of each student in the Day Program. The Day Program is considered to be very expensive and highly restrictive, two characteristics which guarantee high rates of careful scrutiny in today's severe financial climate.

This project represents an important first step in the development of a comprehensive school-based social skills program. Many of the early problems like locating instructional materials and selecting a teaching format and an instructional approach have been solved. The next major step in the long term development of this project must be the production of both short and longer term outcome measures which can demonstrate this program's potency.

Recommendations

The following further modifications to the original design are recommended for anyone who might wish to replicate or advance this project:

1. Select groups for their social compatibility. If the treatment population is composed of seriously disturbed youngsters and the social compatibility dimension is ignored, too much of the treatment time will be taken up sorting out ongoing disputes and problems.

2. Instructional groups like the ones described in this project are generally more effective when they are closed groups. It appears that groups will take more risks, work harder and be

more genuine when they do not have to contend with new members or changing adult facilitators. Our experience caused us to put strict limits on who could drop in on the groups while they were at work.

3. Be prepared to modify most of the commercially available teaching materials. Thought provoking materials are plentiful but they are very expensive and often they are too middle class in their language and their situational examples to be relevant to emotionally disturbed children in care.

4. Continue to search for methods with which to meaningfully evaluate the outcomes of this type of program. The outcome measures in this practicum are too tangential to prove that the children who complete this program will act differently in their classrooms in the future. Knowledge-based tests or role-played problem situations lack the necessary validity to establish that enduring change has occurred.

5. Consider the impact of the children's previous experience with potential instructors and with the physical location of the program. Short, out-of-classroom interventions can elicit dramatic adjustment reactions. Unfamiliar instructors, teaching in an unfamiliar setting, could produce such strong transition reactions in emotionally disturbed children that a significant amount of instruction time would be lost simply attempting to help the students cope with the change.

Continuation

This program was based upon a comprehensive review of the recent theoretical literature on the subject of social skills development in special (emotionally disturbed) populations of

children. The literature provided a framework for understanding the normal origins of children's social skills, the most effective ways to assess children's social skills, the social skills which are most relevant for children in a special education setting, the teaching contexts which are most conducive for learning new social skills, the most effective ways to teach social skills and ways to motivate children to use all their existing social skills.

At the end of the current academic year a further evaluation of the program will be conducted. If again, the results are favorable then one option for the following academic year is the submission of a proposal for increased staffing and support funding to allow the program to serve more than its present capacity for twenty children.

The project will also generate a number of secondary gains for the Agency and perhaps even for other programs in the region. The Agency will accumulate, for its professional library, an orderly collection of current, theoretical books and articles on the topic of children's social skills. The school's curriculum library will acquire useful new resource materials for teaching specific skills. The school staff group will be exposed to additional training in the area of precision teaching. In addition, particularly useful methods, techniques and outcomes will be formally presented by the project primary co-designers to their respective Education and Child and Youth Care colleagues.

[9032 words]

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APPENDICIES

APPENDIX A.

CRITICAL INCIDENTS
Twenty Day Students - Twenty School Days
November 1992.

	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
HD			none																	
MM				1																
LP			1																	
BN			2																	
JU			none																	
GJ							1													1
BJ			none																	
BD			none																	
HB				1					1											
ZS						2		1	1		1				1		1		1	
KE																			1	
TR									1											
HR	1													2			1	1		1
GA		1																		
RD			1															1		
TJ										1										
KM											1									
KT			none																	
MD														1						
KR									1	2		1			1			1		
	1	1	4	2	0	2	1	1	4	3	2	1	0	3	2	0	2	3	2	2

36 Critical Incidents in 20 School Days

APPENDIX B.

Student's Name _____

Primary Problem Behaviour in the School:

Degree of Consensus: H 5 4 3 2 1 L

Listening. Does the student appear to listen when someone is speaking and make an effort to understand what is said?

Asking for Help. Does the student decide when he/she needs assistance and ask for help in a pleasant manner?

Following Instructions. Does the student understand instructions and follow them?

Ignoring Distractions. Does the student ignore classroom distractions?

Joining In. Does the student know and practice acceptable ways of joining an ongoing activity or group?

Knowing Their Feelings. Does the student identify feelings he/she is experiencing?

Dealing With Their Anger. Does the student use acceptable ways to express his/her anger?

Expressing Affection. Does the student let others know he/she cares about them in an acceptable manner?

Dealing With Fear. Does the student know why he/she is afraid and practice strategies to reduce fear?

Using Self-Control. Does the student know and practice strategies to control his/her temper or excitement?

Staying Out Of Fights. Does the student know of and practice socially appropriate ways of handling potential fights?

Negotiating. Is the student willing to give and take in order to reach a compromise?

Saying No. Does the student say no in acceptable ways to things he/she doesn't want to do or to things that may get him/her in trouble?

Deciding What Caused A Problem. Does the student assess what caused a problem and accept the responsibility if appropriate?

APPENDIX C.

SCHOLARLY SOCIAL SKILLS BOOKS

Asher, S. R., & Coie, J. D. (Eds.). (199-). Peer rejection in childhood: Origins, consequences, and interventions. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Bellack, A. S., & Hersen, M. (Eds.).(1979). Research and practice in social skills training. New York: Plenum Press.

Cartledge, G., & Milburn, J. F. (1981). Teaching social skills to children (2nd ed.). New York: Pergamon Press.

Curran, J. P., & Monti, P. M. (Eds.).(1982). Social skills training: A practical handbook for assessment and treatment. New York: Guilford Press.

Eisler, R., & Frederiksen, L. (1980). Perfecting social skills. New York: Plenum Press.

Hollin, C. R., & Trower, P. (Eds.).(1986). Handbook of social skills training: Clinical applications and new directions (Vol. 2). Elmsford, NY: Pergamon Press.

Kelly, J. A. (1982). Social skills training: A practical guide for interventions. New York: Springer Publishing Company.

Kronick, D. (1981). Social development of learning disabled persons. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

L'Abate, L., & Milan, M. A. (Eds.).(1985). Handbook of social skills training and research. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Michelson, L., Sugai, D. P., Wood, R. P., et al. (1983). Social skills assessment and training with children. New York: Plenum Press.

Phillips, E. (1978). The social skills basis of psychopathology. New York: Grune and Stratton.

Spence, S., & Shepherd, G. (Eds.).(1983). Developments in social skills training. London: Academic Press.

Stevens, T. (1978). Social skills in the classroom. Columbus, OH: Cedars Press, Inc.

Trower, P. (Ed.).(1984). Radical approaches to social skills training. London: Croom Helm.

APPENDIX D.

CURRICULUM RESOURCE MATERIALS

Berry, J. (1991). The human race club: A living skills curriculum. (Videocassettes and activity guide). Kelowna, B.C.: Filmwest Associates Distribution Ltd.

Crary, E. (1980). One dozen feeling games. Seattle, WA: Parenting Press.

Freeman, S. M. (1993). From peer pressure to peer support: Alcohol and other drug prevention through group process. Minneapolis, MN: Johnson Institute-QVS, Inc.

Harris, F. W. (1990). Great games to play with groups: A leader's guide. Carthage, IL: Fearon Teacher Aids.

Karnes, M. B. (1986). Primary thinking skills. Book A1. Pacific Grove, CA: Midwest Publications.

Kraskey, L. S. (1987). My ups and downs: A full deck of emotions designed to help children express themselves. Longmont, CO: My Ups and Downs.

Middleton, K. (1990). Into adolescence: Communicating emotions. Contemporary health series. Santa Cruz, CA: Network Publications.

Schrank, L. W., & Miller, C. (1992). Make up your mind! Skillful decisions. (Video tape and guide). Lake Zurich, IL: The Learning Seed.

Schwartz, L. (1988). Feelings about friends: Grades 3 - 6. Santa Barbara, CA: The Learning Works, Inc.

The Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario Division. (1988). Living colour. Building self-esteem & developing communication skills for 9 to 12 year olds. Toronto, Ontario: School Mental Health Program, Canadian Mental Health Association.

Vernon, A. (1989). Thinking, feeling, behaving: An emotional education curriculum for children. Grades 1-6. Champaign, IL: Research Press.

Young, M. J. (1989). Up one day, down the next: Why do I feel the way I do? (Three video cassettes and program guide). Mt. Kisco, NY: Guidance Associates.